



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

██████████  
*Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care)*

39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

Our ref: ██████████

HM Coroner Hannah Godfrey  
Berkshire Coroners Court,  
Reading Town Hall,  
Blagrove Street,  
RG1 1QH

By email: ██████████

15<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Dear Ms Godfrey,

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report of 20 September 2024, sent to the Secretary of State about the death of Mrs Susan Dear. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mrs Dear's death and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns over service pressures at South Central Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SCAS) and ambulance handover delays at Royal Berkshire Hospital and Wexham Park Hospital.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England to ensure we adequately address your concerns. I understand NHS England are writing to you regarding regional service improvements and actions being taken by SCAS. I am also informed they will respond to your concerns on appropriate public education about the circumstances in which it is appropriate to call 999.

At a national level, this government is committed to returning to the safe operational waiting time standards set out in the NHS Constitution. In doing so we will be honest about the challenges facing the health service and serious about tackling them. The Health Secretary ordered an independent investigation of NHS performance to provide an assessment of the issues and challenges it faces. This reported on 12th September 2024 and the investigation's findings will feed into the government's work on a 10-year plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

In the short-term, a range of action is being taken by the NHS this year to improve urgent and emergency care performance, including by maintaining capacity gains in acute hospital beds and ambulance hours on the road achieved in 2023-24, increasing the productivity of

acute and non-acute services across bedded and non-bedded capacity, and directing patients to more appropriate services in the community where these can better meet their needs.

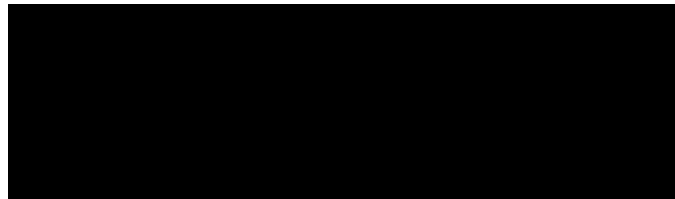
Turning to your concerns on ambulance handover delays, this government is working to improve hospital flow to make sure people do not spend longer than necessary in hospital and reduce delayed discharges. We will tackle delayed discharges by developing local partnership working between the NHS and social care – and making sure people get the right support from health and social care services to return home as soon as possible.

We have also ensured that every acute hospital has access to a care transfer hub. These hubs bring together professionals from the NHS and social care to manage discharges for people with more complex needs who need extra support. In the integrated care systems that face the most discharge delays, the Department is working directly with partners across health and social care to drive improvements.

Health and care systems and providers should work together to ensure that efforts to discharge individuals from hospital into social care are joined up and make best use of available resources, in line with the duty to cooperate set out in Section 82 of the NHS Act 2006.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

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**MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH**